



Libby Asbestos Site

Residential Landscaping Products from the Stimson Mill Site (OU5)

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY REGION 8 JULY 2011

The Issue

Wood chips from the former Stimson Lumber Mill site in the Kootenai River Development Council (also known as Operable Unit 5 of the Libby Asbestos Site) have been sold and distributed as landscaping materials in Libby, MT and elsewhere. This fact sheet provides information about whether these materials are likely to contain asbestos contamination and the potential health risk this may pose. If after reading this fact sheet you remain concerned, please contact one of the representatives listed in the Contacts section of this fact sheet.

What We Know

Operable Unit 5 is located in the eastern section of Libby, MT and includes a number of current and former industrial facilities. The Stimson Lumber Mill operated at the site for many years and produced large volumes of waste wood chips and bark. In October 2007, the EPA collected bulk samples of the wood chips as part of the Remedial Investigation of OU5. The EPA received final sample results in July 2008, which showed the presence of Libby Amphibole asbes-

tos (LA) in a limited number of the samples.

The EPA also collected activity based samples (air sampling during actual disturbance of the materials), which showed no detections of LA during the activities performed. The EPA shared the results of these sampling efforts with the Kootenai River Development Council (KRDC) in August 2009, and in March 2011, the EPA offered to assist KRDC with analyzing asbestos in the wood chips and, in the meantime, recommended that KRDC treat the wood chips as a potentially regulated material. In April 2011, the EPA further recommended that KRDC cease sale and distribution of the materials pending further analysis by the EPA.

Next Steps

The EPA recognizes that this information may cause concerns for anyone in Libby who may have placed wood chips on their property from the Stimson site. As a result, the EPA is committed to a number of activities to attempt to alleviate these concerns and already has taken the first step in this process. Unless the EPA can confirm that the wood chip materials pose an unacceptable risk or may pose an imminent and

substantial endangerment to public health or the environment, the Agency does not have the authority to stop the property owner from selling and distributing them from the site. Nonetheless, the EPA can and has asked that this activity be stopped while additional analysis takes place.

The EPA intends to further assess the LA concentrations that may be present in the wood chip materials and the associated potential health risks. The EPA will analyze additional bulk samples taken from the site in 2007 and will conduct activity based sampling for typical homeowner exposures to the bark materials as well. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the EPA will keep the residents of Libby informed about this issue to the best of our ability through newspaper articles, public meetings, and other avenues.

Background

The EPA has been working in Libby since 1999 when an Emergency Response Team was sent to investigate local concerns and news articles about asbestos-contaminated vermiculite. Since that time, the EPA has been working closely with the community to clean up contamination and reduce risks to human health. Since November 1999, EPA has cleaned up the major source areas of contamination around town. The EPA is now cleaning up less concentrated but more widely distributed sources found in a variety of places such as around homes and businesses. To date, the EPA has re-

moved asbestos contamination from nearly 1,500 residential and commercial properties. With continued community support, the EPA is hopeful that this very serious environmental problem can be addressed for the citizens of Libby.

Questions and Answers

What can I do if I have landscaping material from the Stimson site in my yard?

If you have used material from the Stimson site in your yard and the EPA has not yet investigated your yard for potential soil removal, notify the EPA contractor of the issue at the time of the property investigation. If your yard has already undergone a removal and you have placed material in your yard since that time, call EPA's Libby Information Center or the Environmental Resource Specialist Program for assistance. The EPA on-site Project Manager or the Environmental Resource Specialist will advise you on what steps to take.

Why has it taken so long for EPA to fully assess the risk posed by the wood piles?

Unfortunately, the Libby Asbestos Site contains many potential sources of asbestos contamination and the EPA must prioritize our response activities to address the worst sources and highest exposures first. Initial sampling results and historical information did not indicate that the wood chip piles constituted a major source of as-

bestos. Further, the activity based sampling indicated that the wood chips stored in OU5 did not result in asbestos exposure for individuals working on and around them.

Environmental Resource Specialist:

406-291-5335

Libby Web Page:

<http://www.epa.gov/region8/superfund/libby/>

What action is EPA taking now?

The EPA has asked Kootenai River Development Council to stop the sale of the wood chips while EPA collects data to further evaluate their contents. Unless the EPA can confirm that the wood chip material poses an unacceptable risk or may pose an imminent and substantial endangerment to public health or the environment, the Agency does not have the authority to stop them from selling and distributing the material from the site.

The EPA intends to further assess the level of asbestos in the wood chip materials. EPA will reanalyze a portion of the bulk samples taken from the site in 2007 and will conduct new activity based sampling on the material as well.

Finally, the EPA is committed to keeping the residents of Libby informed about this issue through newspaper articles, public meetings, this fact sheet and the web page.

Contacts

Libby Information Center:

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406-293-6194